

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

ScienceDirect

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 203 (2015) 28 – 34

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

International Conference EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY CHALLENGES - TEACHERS
FOR THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY - 3RD EDITION, EPC-TKS 2015

The Elephant in the Room or Updating the Teaching Profession

Țîmpău Cristina^{a*}

^aFaculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, Panduri Road, No. 90, Bucharest

Abstract

Being a teacher today in a global and dynamic Romanian society is a real challenge. School needs time to adapt and requires a good educational system to deliver satisfactory results. We have just learnt to assume our guilt and responsibility for the present state of affairs of the Romanian educational system, an attitude which is visible, although not recognizable. This paper talks about current problems of the Romanian educational system that result in an increasing number of poorly prepared students. We argue, as many authors do, that investment in teacher selection and preparation is the most efficient strategy that could be adopted in terms of the relationship cost-benefit.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific Committee of EPC-TKS 2015.

Keywords: career development staff, rigorous selection of teachers, alternative access routes □n teaching career, mentoring.

1. Where we are and where we go

Over the last years Romanian education seems to slide on a downward spiral, this being shown by the latest data such as the results of the Baccalaureate examinations, of the national tests of graduation of the compulsory school, and of the international PISA and PIRLS assessments.

* Corresponding author. Tel +4 0728248007

E-mail address: cristinatimpau89@gmail.com

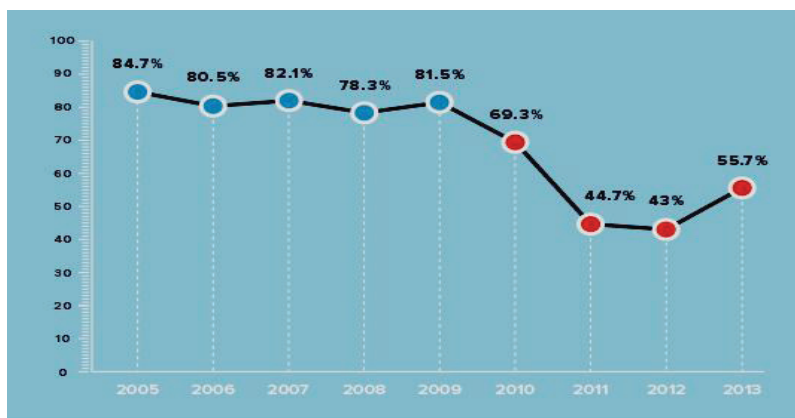


Figure 1. Percentage of students who passed the Baccalaureate, 2005-2013

The results show a sharp drop in the number of students who passed the Baccalaureate: from 69.3% in 2009 to 55.7% in 2013. The results in international tests also decreased, as seen in the table below.

Year	Testing	Results
2007	TIMSS	Rank 28 (out of 49) Mathematics: rank 25 out of 49 participating countries
2009	PISA	Rank 47 out of 57 countries tested
2009	PISA	Rank 49 out of 65 countries tested Mathematics: rank 45 out of 65 countries Read / Lecture- rank 50 out of 65 Sciences – rank 49 out of 65
2011	PIRLS	Rank 33 out of 45 participating countries
2012	PISA	Rank 45 out of 65 participating countries Mathematics: rank 45 out of 65 Read / Reading: rank 50 out of 65 Science: rank 49 out of 65 countries

2. What did other countries do after obtaining bad results in the tests?

In the United Kingdom (Scotland) in 2012, The Government prepared a guide for teachers to improve their teaching activities. This guide focused on six key areas: increasing ambition, aspirations and expectations of every child and young person, providing every day learning and excellent teaching in every classroom, developing an effective leadership at all levels, family and community engagement, wide focus on literacy and numeracy as platforms on which to build future learning and use the information wisely to understand progress. This guide is part of a wider work program designed to assist teachers, schools and other parts of the system in terms of increasing results.

In Sweden and Norway, schools are responsible for providing all the tools and support mechanisms necessary to meet learning objectives that have been set for each level of education (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2012).

If we analyze the results of Romanian students we notice that in 2009-2013, at least 40% of students did not graduate from high school. The situation is even more anomalous because, knowing the economic situation of Romania, most of them will enter the labour market as unskilled workers.

“Teachers’ skills to work with students who have a wide range of competences and interests are essential to diminish unsatisfactory results. The findings of research on effective teaching indicate that teachers must choose appropriate methods and strategies to suit the student and a particular learning context. However, for teachers to be able to provide this flexibility in pedagogy, which is a key element in combating poor results, it is essential that they have access to effective professional development (EACEA / Eurydice 2011c, pp. 51-52).

At the same time, teachers did not manage to pass their examinations. Only 47.8% of teachers who signed up for the examination in 2013 passed it, obtaining grades between 7 and 10, while 20.1% did not pass it. Countries like Canada or Finland which have good results in international charts referring to PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS invest a lot to offer teachers a rigorous training. For example, in Finland there are Teacher Training Departments in 8 universities and annually, only 1 out of 10 applicants is admitted to study to become a teacher. All over the country only 5,000 teachers out of 20,000 candidates are admitted to practice after passing a written pedagogy examination, after participating in practical tests and attending a job interview. However, the teaching profession is highly required in Finland not only because of the generous wage, but also because of the teacher's status in society.

In Romania there are only 44 Teacher Training Departments (TTD) operating in state universities and 9 TTDs operating within the private universities. It is fact that Romanian teachers' salaries are among the lowest in the European Union in relation to GDP per capita (Eurydice, 2013)



Fig. 2. Teachers' salaries at European level. Source: Eurydice.

However, Pink (2009) talks about the connection between motivation and money in his "The surprising truth about what motivates us", explaining that high wages do not constitute strong motivation for the development of the cognitive qualities required by the teaching profession. The more cognitively demanding the job is the less effective the financial reward is. In exchange, autonomy, good preparation in terms of professional development increases motivation.

3. Romanian education is ill! Treat it or bury it?

The analysis of PISA results shows that one of the major problems of Romanian education is the lack of correlation between theoretical knowledge and practical applications. Students do not know what they can do after graduating schools and this leads to low motivation for studying. It seems that training teachers is another major problem that we have to face.

We cannot claim to have well-trained teachers if we do not develop training schemes to meet quality standards. The Romanian educational system has functioned on the principle of improvisation for a long time. This principle

has led to bad results repeatedly and persisted in the same errors. Teaching masters ought to exist in order to provide good training skills. Pedagogical modules should be studied in faculties by Romanian students and they should be given more attention: students should have access to quality training, not only methodological, but also pedagogical, benefitting from pedagogical practice throughout the module and not only for a period of two weeks. Evaluation should be rigorous, consisting in a portfolio that could attest the skills of a future teacher who is responsible for the destiny of the country's citizens. The teacher should be a model for his/her students.

Although the Education Law 1/2011 speaks of competence-based education, Romanian teachers continue to fill the minds of the students with information that is no longer useful: "we do everything on paper". Poor preparation prevents teachers from helping students to understand the applicability of learned and concrete information they receive in school.

Romanian students do not cultivate creativity, do not link theory and practice, they do not stimulate intuitive learning, and finally they do not have skills as required to fulfill the educational aims stipulated by the education law.

Who is to blame? Teachers blame the students. Students blame the teachers. Parents blame the school. But we all ignore the giant elephant in our living room. Instead of being crushed under its weight, we need teachers who do their duty. We can't continue to take the guilt and we cannot always blame the lack of money, we should change the facts.

If one looks at the data of Eurydice reports on the Romanian teachers, the following aspects are mentioned:

1. There are no selection methods for teachers (anybody can attend the psycho-pedagogical module);
2. There are no guidelines for training future teachers, based on the knowledge and practice of educational research;
3. Support for beginning teachers; this method is not developed in Romania.
4. Recruitment methods consist only in using employment examinations (compared to the EU where open recruitment is based on an interview);
5. Central authority decides what positions can be taken by candidates (the problem being how to select the right person in the right place);
6. In Romania there are no periods of probation, the experience is taken for granted as you enter the school (whereas in the EU, most countries allow the employee a minimum period to gain experience);
7. The quality of education is monitored by centralized authorities;
8. Wages are set by the authorities, classroom performance being not relevant in all cases.

PISA 2012 reveals another reason connected with the students' results: motivation for learning is the lowest in comparison to EU countries. The Romanian students are out of this frame as indicated in the figure below:

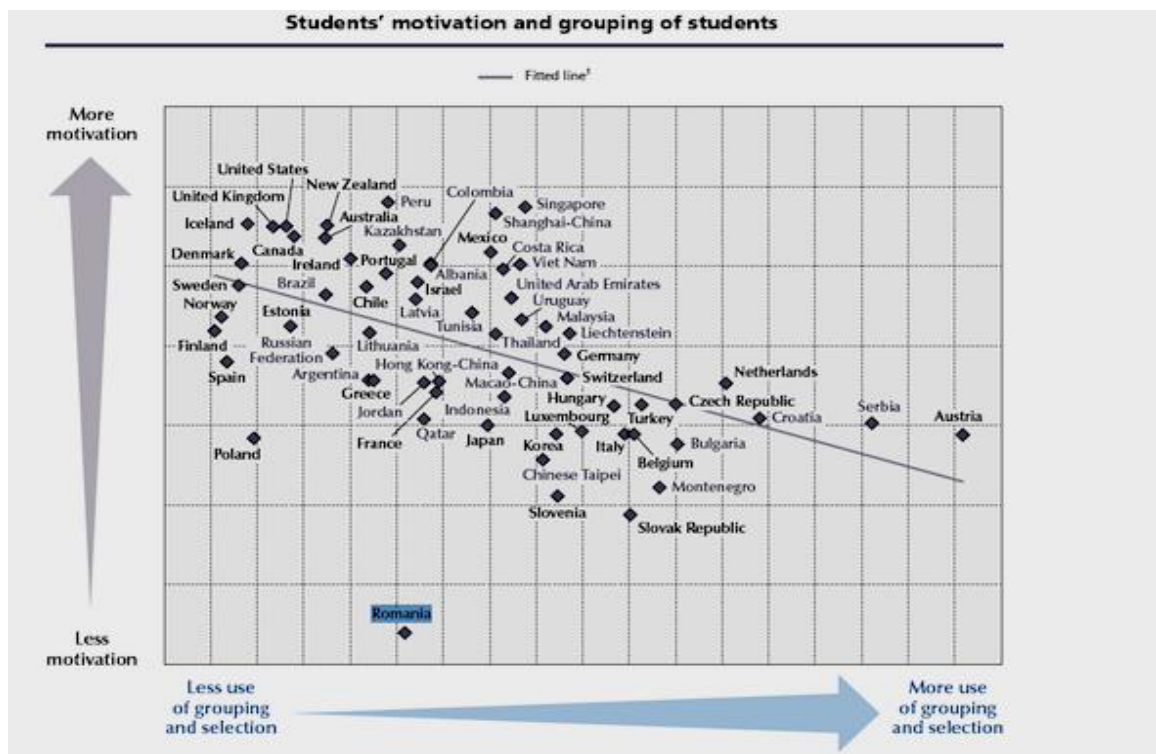


Fig. 3. Motivation for learning of Romanian students

A survey conducted in 2011 by CMBRAE (Centers of educational resources and psycho-pedagogical support that exists in any county of Romania) found that teachers have a limited influence on students' reasons for learning. The most relevant differences in options between the teachers and the students' answers are colored in blue.

Response options	Teachers	Students
To have a successful career	19,3%	70,62%
Disciplines will be useful later	42,86%	51,8%
The information is interesting and attractive	48,79%	40,43%
To get good grades	12,5%	36,72%
<i>The teacher inspires respect, is a model</i>	<i>46,98%</i>	<i>26,35%</i>
<i>Because the teacher has an attractive teaching style</i>	<i>53,96%</i>	<i>23,43%</i>
Parents insist on our learning	39,73%	15,71%
The teacher inspires fear	23,68%	4,53%

The same study also gives some explanations to these differences. To the question: "Would learning increase motivation?", the answers were:

Response options	Teachers	Students
More attractive classes	80,8%	35,05%
Use lessons for practical purpose	61,6%	54,03%
The well-being during classes	59,9%	52,94%

And now that our elephant has a name and an identity, we can proceed to outline the steps we must follow to eliminate the deficiencies of education or at least to mitigate the threat hanging over our heads. The measures we propose in this brief analysis of the teaching career concerns aims at developing a professional who knows how to manage work with students, a good relationship with parents, how to plan, organize and evaluate.

In conclusion, the system requires a reboot, a reconfiguration of the teaching profession that should be anchored in reality. We know that the problem is related to a total reform of the education system but this is not the perfect solution to all negative aspects. Our proposals head towards professionalizing the teaching career, adapting it to European standards and to the society we live in.

1. Adding value and social recognition to the teaching profession;
2. A good selection of teachers at the school level;
3. Rigorous selection methods, depending on the subject that is taught and the teaching skills in class;
4. Creation of alternative access routes in the teaching career;
5. The existence of a probationary period, allowing teachers to adapt and develop their skills;
6. Teachers' absolute authority and responsibility in the classroom;
7. Rules for the institutions responsible for monitoring the quality of teaching in the classroom (headmaster, colleagues, parents);
8. Ensure progress in career based on professional competence;
9. Improving alternatives for communicating with students, taking into account their needs: career counseling, coaching, writing projects, mentoring / tutoring as support for beginning teachers.

We propose the following action plan:

(1) Conduct a campaign to promote the importance of the teaching profession in press and universities: making reports to illustrate some examples of best practices, developing advertising and conferences to discuss the importance of education for people's optimal integration in today's society and emphasizing the importance of teachers.

(2, 3) Schools will conduct interviews with teachers applying for jobs. Interviews will have in view the motivation of the teacher to fill a particular position and discussions about topical issues regarding education (for instance, use of technology in education). Also, the teacher will be required to teach a demonstrative lesson in the presence of the school head and other responsible persons within the unit. The mark obtained in the examination will represent only 50% of the final mark necessary to get job.

(4) We propose the creation of alternative routes to have access to the teaching career because shortage of qualified teachers is a problem especially in rural areas. This can be achieved through training programs with a duration ranging between 3-6 months and then placing graduates to work during a trial period of 1-2 years. Online courses are also a solution for teachers in rural areas. We believe that programs for teacher qualification emergency lasting 2-4 months should be designed.

(5) Establish a probationary period of 2 years for novice teachers should be a priority. In this period, the teacher should get support from mentors appointed by the school and from consultants (who can be inspectors) who frequently come in the institution to provide feedback and guidance.

(6) The teacher should choose his own textbooks, teaching aids and teaching methods that are most suitable for the students. Also the teacher should constantly communicate with parents and colleagues. Periodic self-assessments are required to determine his strengths, weaknesses and the direction to follow.

(7) Along with self-assessment the teacher should be also assessed by peers and parents. Monthly the school head or another official appointed by him attends classes and makes a list of suggestions.

(8) Promotions should take place according to the effort the teacher has proved during his/her work with students and relationships with parents and other teachers. Teachers must prove adequate teaching competence to get promoted, not just graduating programs that offer diplomas.

(9) Teachers should provide constant feedback to students and guide them permanently. Senior teachers will be mentors for beginner teachers, but also for their students. Teachers will be encouraged to take initiative (to write and carry out projects in schools or outside school) and will be supported in their initiatives.

This information may be used to constitute "The Charter of the teaching profession."

References

- Comisia Europeană/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013. Date cheie privind cadrele didactice și conducătorii de școli din Europa. Editia 2013. Raport Eurydice. Luxemburg: Oficiul pentru publicații al Uniunii Europene.
- Comisia Europeană/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013. Teachers' and School Heads' Salaries and Allowances in Europe 2012/2013.
- Glass, G. (2008). *Alternative Certification of Teachers*. Arizona State University: Education Policy Research Unit
- Legea educației naționale nr. 1/2011.
- Moore, T. (2008). *Finnish Education System*. Northern Ireland Assembly: Research and Library Services.
- Pink, D. (2009). *Drive. The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- PISA 2012. Results in Focus. What 15-year-olds know and what they can do with what they know.